

Testimony of Dr. Steve R. Ruiz
Appropriations Committee
February 22, 2022
UConn Health/School of Dental Medicine Funding

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share my thoughts on the amazing work done at the UConn School of Dental Medicine and its importance to the citizens of CT. I am an Assistant Professor in the Division of General Dentistry and I joined the faculty in 2017, but my association with UConn has a much longer history. I was born in Florida and grew up in Guatemala; I graduated dental school in Guatemala and when I decided to pursue residency training, I knew I wanted to do my residency at UConn as both my father and brother had done so in the 1980's and 2000's respectively. I completed two years of general dentistry residency training, followed by an oral surgery fellowship at UConn and joined the faculty following the fellowship.

My first years as faculty were spent as the dental director of the CT Department of Developmental Services (DDS) dental clinic in Norwich, CT working with patients with developmental disabilities. My training at UConn prepared me for this activity, which is a unique and long-standing partnership between the School of Dental Medicine and DDS. One of my fellow faculty serves as similar role at the Southbury Training School. Although I recently transitioned to new responsibilities as program director of the general dentistry residency program, I continue to provide care to individuals with acquired and developmental disabilities.

My wife is also a full time faculty member at the School of Dental Medicine and she spends the majority of her time at an affiliated federally qualified community health center as part of her faculty duties. The School's partnerships and affiliations creatively address access to care issues and help address workforce issues to meet the needs of the citizens of CT. In fact, many providers and dental directors at community health centers throughout the state are graduates of our School.

As the only dental school in the state – and the only public dental school in New England, we play a critical role in training the next generation of dental providers. More than half of practicing dentists in CT are proud UConn alums. We are the largest single provider of dental care to the state's most vulnerable and underserved citizens and provide for 24/7 access to emergency dental care. Our patient care and educational programs exist in an environment where faculty are engaged in scientific discovery, scholarly activity and robust extramurally funded research. We are a small school committed to making a big impact.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our faculty, residents and students continued to meet the oral healthcare needs of the communities we served. In addition, we actively participated in statewide community efforts, alongside our UConn Health colleagues, to provide vaccinations and supportive care wherever needed.

I am proud to be part of an energetic, vibrant, and supportive community at UConn Health. We need to continue our upward trajectory of successes in education and research and continue in our history of unwavering service to the citizens of Connecticut. With your generous support, we will be able to do so. Thank you.